

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 1529

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI GR US

SUBJ: SIXTH FLEET SHIP VISITS TO GREECE

1. SIXTH FLEET SHIPS REGULARLY VISITED GREEK PORTS FOR MANY YEARS, UNTIL THE CRISIS OF JULY/AUGUST 1974 AND THE CONSEQUENT CHANGE OF REGIME PRODUCED A CLIMATE OF PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENTAL OPINION IN GREECE WHICH MILITATED AGAINST SUCH VISITS. AS A RESULT, NO PORT VISITS TOOK PLACE TO ANY GREEK PORT (WORKING VISITS AND HOMEPORTED UNITS ASIDE) FROM JULY 1974 UNTIL JANUARY 1976, EXCEPTING THE LIMITED PROGRAM OF VISITS BY ESCORT-TYPE SHIPS TO THE ELEFSIS PIER IN OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1975. THE ONLY OTHER ATTEMPT TO CARRY OUT A VISIT DURING THIS PERIOD WAS TO CORFU IN JANUARY 1975, AN ATTEMPT WHICH WAS ABORTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOG WHEN A HOSTILE DEMONSTRATION PRECLUDED A PEACEFUL SOJOURN THERE FOR THE CREW.

2. IN RESPONDING TO OUR ATTEMPT TO EXPAND THE OPENING FOR PORT VISITS PROVIDED BY THE OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1975 VISITS TO THE ELEFSIS PIER, AND FOLLOWING THE PERSONAL INTERVENTION OF THE AMBASSADOR WITH DEFMIN AVEROFF, THE
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GOG APPROVED SEPARATE VISITS TO PIRAEUS BY TWO ESCORT SHIPS IN JANUARY 1976. AS WAS THE CASE FOR THE VISITS TO

THE ELEFSIS PIER, THE U.S. NAVY TOOK EXTRAORDINARY AND HIGHLY COMMENDABLE CARE IN BRIEFING CREW MEMBERS AND CONTROLLING THE VISITS, RESULTING IN INCIDENT-FREE VISITS TO PIRAEUS. ODDLY ENOUGH, AND UNLIKE THE ELEFSIS PIER VISITS, NO PUBLICITY ATTENDED THESE VISITS TO PIRAEUS.

3. THE SUCCESS OF THE JANUARY VISITS TO PIRAEUS SEEMED TO MAKE GOG APPROVAL PROBABLE FOR SIMILAR VISITS IN FEBRUARY. UNFORTUNATELY, THE GOG DISAPPROVED OUR REQUEST FOR A SCHEDULE OF FEBRUARY VISITS TO THE ATEHSN AREA SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH IT HAD APPROVED FOR JANUARY. IN DOING SO, THE ALTERNATIVE OF SMALLER, DISTANT PORTS WAS SUGGESTED BY HN OFFICERS, A SUGGESTION WHICH SOON NARROWED TO KALAMATA. THE KALAMATA OPTION WAS TAKEN BY THE SIXTH FLEET, AND THE FIRST SUCH VISIT THERE WAS CARRIED OUT FEBRUARY 8-13 AND ANOTHER IS SLATED FOR FEB 24-29. ALTHOUGH KALAMATA IS NOT AN UNATTRACTIVE PORT FOR AN OCCASIONAL VISIT BY A SINGLE SHIP, IT IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE LARGER PORTS OF GREECE.

4. THE REASON ADDUCED BY THE GOG FOR ITS DISAPPROVAL OF FEBRUARY SHIP VISITS TO ATHENS WAS AN UNDEFINED DANGER FROM WHICH IT OSTENSIBLY WAS PROTECTING THE SHIPS AND THEIR CREWS. IN FACT, THE MOTIVATION WAS PROBABLY THE GOG'S APPREHENSION THAT A PERCEIVED RETURN TO REGULAR SIXTH FLEET SHIP VISITS TO ATHENS WOULD BE REGARDED BY A SIGNIFICANT BODY OF PUBLIC OPINION, INCLUDING ALL THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION (AND, PERHAPS, BY SOME OF THE GOVERNING PARTY'S OWN DEPUTIES), AS "TOO MUCH, TOO SOON." THE GOG'S REASONING AND THE EFFECT IT WISHED TO AVOID IN SO ACTING ARE SIMILAR TO THE SITUATION SURROUNDING THE GOG'S REFUSAL TO AGREE TO AN APPROPRIATELY-WORDED JOINT COMMUNIQUE ON THE RESULTS OF THE RECENTLY-COMPLETED THIRD ROUND OF BASE NEGOTIATIONS, I.E., BECAUSE IT DID NOT YET WISH TO CONFRONT THE OPPOSITION ON THE ISSUE OF GREECE'S SECURITY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES.

5. THE GOG'S TENTATIVE APPROVAL OF THE MARCH VISIT TO PIRAEUS OF COMSIXTHFLEET EMBARKED ON HIS FLAGSHIP, THE
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CRUISER LITTLE ROCK, (WE ARE STILL AWAITING WRITTEN CONFIRMATION), APPEARS TO BE INCONSISTENT WITH THE FORTHGOING. IT MAY BE THAT THIS VISIT WILL, IN THE GOG'S JUDGMENT, PROVIDE THE APPROPRIATE OCCASION TO SIGNAL TO GREEK PUBLIC OPINION THAT IT IS MOVING BACK TOWARD A CLOSE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES. SHOULD THIS PROVE TO BE THE CASE, IT WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT AND VERY WELCOME MILESTONE ON WHAT IS TURNING OUT TO BE A LONG ROAD TOWARD THAT OBJECTIVE. AT LEAST EQUALLY POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, IS AN INTERIM GOG CONCEPT OF EQUIVA-

LENCE OF TREATMENT FOR THE U.S. NAVY WITH THAT GIVEN TO BRITISH AND FRENCH UNITS, WHICH HAVE VISITED PIRAEUS IN RECENT MONTHS. IF THIS CONCEPT, OR ANOTHER SET OF MOTIVATING FACTORS SIMILAR IN EFFECT, UNDERLIES THE GOG APPROVAL OF COMSIXTHFLEET'S VISIT, WE WOULD NOT ANTICIPATE AN EARLY RETURN TO THE PATTERN OF SHIP VISITS WHICH PREVAILED IN GREECE UP TO JULY 1974.

6. THE DISAPPOINTMENT RESULTING FROM THE GOG'S RELUCTANCE TO PERMIT FEBRUARY PORT VISITS TO PIRAEUS IS ALLAYED TO SOME DEGREE BY THE OFFER OF THE ALTERNATIVE OF KALAMATA. WHILE CONTINUING TO SEEK GOG CONCURRENCE FOR SHIP VISITS TO ATHENS, WE SHOULD CONCURRENTLY SEEK TO WIDEN OUR ACCESS TO SUCH OTHER PORTS. A PROGRAM OF VISITS TO PORTS OTHER THAN ATEHENS WHICH WOULD GRADUALLY INCREASE IN FREQUENCY AND GEOGRAPHICAL EXTENT IS THE ROUTE WHICH WE HAVE LONG FELT WOULD BE MOST ACCEPTABLE TO THE GOG IN RETURNING TO SOMETHING APPROACHING NORMALITY. THE FEBRUARY VISITS TO KALAMATA MAY WELL BE ANOTHER IMPORTANT STEP ON SUCH A ROUTE.

7. NOTWITHSTANDING THE U.S. NAVY'S EXEMPLARY FORBEARANCE IN THE FACE OF ITS DIFFICULT POSITION IN GREECE AND THE GREAT CARE IT HAS TAKEN TO ENSURE THAT INCIDENTS DO NOT OCCUR, THE TIMETABLE FOR RETURN TO A MORE DESIRABLE STATE OF AFFAIRS WILL BE ESTABLISHED IN LARGE MEASURE BY THE PACE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN GREECE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH TURKEY CONCERNING CYPRUS AND THE RANGE OF AEGEAN ISSUES. KUBISCH

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